

field Defense Department hospital to care for any of our health care workers who become ill. Also contributing to our national reaction to this epidemic is the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The CDC has deployed personnel to Africa, and the National Institute of Health is developing an investigational Ebola vaccine. CDC is also working with Customs and Border Patrol to identify travelers showing any signs of infectious disease.

I support these efforts to contain the Ebola epidemic and know we will monitor this humanitarian crisis in the weeks ahead.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Tennessee.

EBOLA EPIDEMIC

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, before discussing the legislation involving the National Labor Relations Board which the Republican leader mentioned, I wish to align myself with his comments on the Ebola epidemic. In my view, he is right to support the President's effort for a more urgent response to this epidemic.

I am not given to making overstatements—I think that would be a fair reputation in this body—but I believe we should treat the Ebola epidemic as seriously as we treat the danger of ISIS. Why would I say that? Because the head of the Centers for Disease Control and our United Nations Ambassador, who is working with other countries to get them involved, say this: This is one of the most deadly, explosive epidemics in modern times. It moves rapidly. There is no vaccine, and there is no cure. One sick person can fairly quickly infect 20 other persons within a family in these West African countries where it is now a problem. One can see how quickly this could spread and become hundreds of thousands of cases or even millions of cases.

This is a case where Samantha Power said to me: We should be running toward burning flames with our fireproof suits on. In other words, we know how to control it. We know how to identify sick people and isolate them and treat them. Even though half of them die, we know how to do that. But the rate of growth of this epidemic is so rapid that we need to have a response that is as urgent as the problem.

I congratulate the Republican leader for supporting the President's effort today to call attention to this. So much is happening in the world, and there is a possibility that we would treat the Ebola epidemic as an important issue but not a major issue. As I said, I believe we must take the deadly,

dangerous threat of Ebola as seriously as we take the threat of ISIS.

I support the administration's recommendation to spend \$30 million in the continuing resolution to upgrade the public health efforts there. I support the reprogramming of \$500 million to involve the military in a way to deal with this. I support the effort to spend \$58 million, which would be to fast track efforts to develop a treatment and cure, as well as vaccines to prevent it.

NLRB REFORM

Mr. President, the Republican leader spoke about legislation he and I are introducing today which we call the National Labor Relations Board Reform Act.

(The remarks of Senator ALEXANDER pertaining to the introduction of S. 2814 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. ALEXANDER. I thank the Chair. I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I have great respect for the Senator from Tennessee, having worked together on many issues, as politicians often throw those words around. He is a good person, a good Senator. I enjoy working with him. I do have to take exception to one thing, though.

EQUAL PAY

Mr. DURBIN. Yesterday we had a vote on a labor issue. This was a vote as to whether men and women in the workplace working the same jobs get the same pay. Most people would say: Well, isn't that the law already? Yes.

Unfortunately, the law as written in 1963 with the Equal Pay Act isn't working very well. In a lot of workplaces women are paid less. In the State of Illinois, it is about 75 cents for every dollar paid to a man for most women unless you happen to be an African man and then it is 65 cents, or Hispanic, it is 65 cents. The actual working relationships in many businesses discriminate against women.

We offered a bill yesterday to the Equal Pay Act brought to the floor by Senator MIKULSKI of Maryland and Senator BOXER of California. We asked if we could now revisit the Equal Pay Act to make sure it is enforceable and that it works so that literally if my son or my daughter ended up with the same job and the same workplace and the same work record, they would get the same pay. Not a radical idea by any measure. That was what we brought up for a vote yesterday.

I took a look at the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD to refresh my memory and talked with the staff. Not one Republican Senator would vote for that bill—not one. There were 52 votes in favor of moving forward on this bill. All of them were from the Democratic side.

So when I listen to these calls for reform when it comes to labor laws and

bipartisanship when it comes to labor laws, my obvious question to my friends on the other side of the aisle is: Where were you yesterday? We had a chance here on the floor of the Senate to do something on a bipartisan basis for pay equity, equal pay for men and women in the workplace.

This is not the first time we faced this issue. Lilly Ledbetter became somewhat legendary in America. This lady, whom I had the privilege to meet a few times, had a tough job. She worked at a tire manufacturing facility in Alabama. She worked hard for a long time. As she was nearing retirement, someone went up to her and said: Lilly, you have been a manager around here a lot of years, but they are paying you a heck of a lot less than the men who have the same job in this plant. She didn't quit.

They don't publish the wages of all coworkers so that you would know this. She was upset about it. She spent all those years working there and she was being discriminated against because she was a woman. She filed a lawsuit, as she was entitled to under the law, saying that this was discriminatory and she was entitled to back pay for this discrimination.

The Supreme Court, right across the street, threw out the lawsuit and said she didn't report this discrimination in a timely fashion. She didn't report that she was being paid less within a certain number of months, and her response was: How would I even know that? I don't know what that man who was the manager next to me is being paid any more than he knows what I am being paid.

That is what the Supreme Court decided.

The first bill that was signed into law by President Obama, the Lilly Ledbetter Act, said that Lilly Ledbetter and people like her at a future time would be allowed to sue for back wages if they were discriminated against.

Very few, if any, Republicans supported this. When I hear speeches on the floor about reforming labor laws and the workplace laws in America, let's do it in a bipartisan fashion. When it got down to the real basics, S. 2199 yesterday, not a single Republican would join us, not one. I would think they would feel as we do. It is only fair. It is only fair that if you are in the workplace doing the same job, you get the same pay. Unfortunately, not one of them would. So when they call for reforming the National Labor Relations Board and they call for bipartisanship, I think it should start right here when it comes to legislation that comes before the Senate.

I also listened to the Republican Senate leader come to the floor today and talk about the state of our economy. I wonder sometimes if Members of the Senate, who are entitled to their own opinions, should also be entitled to their own facts because what the Senator from Kentucky failed to note was

the economy which President Obama inherited when he took office in January 2009. It was in sad shape.

What a contrast from 8 years before when President Bill Clinton left office in January of 2001, 14 years ago. We had gone through a period of 4 straight years of Federal budget surplus. A Democratic President, 4 straight years of Federal budget surplus, and President Clinton left to the new President, George W. Bush, a surplus in the next year's budget of \$120 billion, if my memory serves me.

The last time that happened, 4 straight years of surplus, had been 40 years before. So here is Democratic President Clinton leaving office to President George W. Bush with a string of surpluses in the budget that we hadn't seen for four decades.

In addition, President Clinton was taking the surplus and investing it in Social Security so that it was stronger than it had been in years because of the surpluses.

During the period of the Clinton Presidency, 23 million new jobs were created in this country. Eight years, 23 million jobs, and government spending was still growing each year. Yet there were surpluses, job creation, and economic growth in the 8-year period of time.

When President Clinton left office, the national debt that had been accumulated over the entire history of the United States totaled \$5 trillion. That was January of 2001. He handed that economy and that budget to President George W. Bush.

Now fast forward 8 years. What did President George W. Bush hand to new President Barack Obama? One of the weakest economies America had seen since the Great Depression. The month President Obama took the oath of office in January of 2009, when he put his hand on the same Bible Abraham Lincoln used when he was sworn in as President, that month we lost nearly 800,000 jobs in America. That previous year, private employers had shed more than 4 million jobs. We know what happened to savings and retirement accounts. They were devastated by that recession. The economy was shrinking.

In just 8 years, President George W. Bush took one of the strongest, fastest growing economies in American history and, sadly, turned it into an economic recession. How did he do it? Tax breaks for wealthy people and wars that were not paid for. Those were the two things that drove us from a \$5 trillion debt when President Clinton left office—cumulative debt in the history of America.

When President George W. Bush left office, handing it over to President Obama, the national debt had broken \$5 trillion to \$12 trillion. It more than doubled in the 8-year period of time. So President Obama had a challenge. Get the economy back on its feet.

Right now, Public Television has a series on the Roosevelts. I have enjoyed it because Ken Burns is one of

the best. He is telling the story of Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt.

We remember what happened when Franklin Roosevelt came to office at the end of 1932 and the beginning of 1933, facing the Great Depression in America. He said: We have to get America back to work. That is what President Obama says. The stimulus package. Let's get back to work here. Let's put people earning paychecks into a position where they can save their homes and keep their families together and rebuild the economy. He got almost no help from the other side of the aisle.

Remember the automobile industry. Remember what was happening in the automobile industry when President Obama took over office from President Bush. It was flat on its back. Two major companies, Chrysler and General Motors, were facing bankruptcy and even the prospect of going out of business.

President Obama said: We cannot let this happen. There are too many good-paying jobs across America. He stepped in and helped by loaning money to these automobile companies to get back on their feet.

Just last week I had some auto dealers from the Chicagoland area come to see me in my office. One said, Do you know what happened? We were selling about 9 million cars when the recession hit. Now we are back on our feet. We are up to 16 million a year. The automobile industry is coming back strong.

I look at Illinois and I can see it in Belvidere where the Fiat Chrysler plant is working three shifts. I see it at the Ford plant on the South Side of Chicago. They are working three shifts as well.

President Obama said: Let's get back to work. Let's save the auto industry. He did. Now they come to the floor and say: You know, it just hasn't been fast enough.

When it came to the stimulus package, we had little or no support from the other side of the aisle. When it came to rebuilding my State of Illinois and across the country, it was resistance.

Then comes the issue of health insurance. I want to say a word about that. I have voted for the Affordable Care Act. It may be one of the most important votes ever cast.

I did it for personal reasons because I personally experienced with my family a moment when we had no health insurance.

My wife and I got married very young. I was still in law school. God sent us a baby. She had some medical issues. We had no health insurance. I was going to school here at Georgetown Law School. I would leave class, pick up my wife and baby and go to the charity ward at Children's Hospital in Washington, DC.

We were sitting in there with a number in my hand waiting to see who would walk through that door to be the

doctor to save my baby's life. I had no health insurance. I have never felt more helpless as a husband and father than at that moment.

I believe today, as I did then, that should never happen to any family. I believe this great Nation should provide basic health care for everyone living in this great Nation. That is why I voted for the Affordable Care Act.

What has happened since? Eight million Americans are now insured under the Affordable Care Act. We have seen an 8-percent decline in uninsured people in my home State and many States.

One of the most successful States when it comes to the Affordable Care Act happens to be the Commonwealth of Kentucky which the Republican Senate leader represents.

They have signed up in substantial numbers. Hundreds of thousands of people in his State now have health insurance because the Affordable Care Act, which some characterize in a friendly or derogatory way as ObamaCare, has worked.

What has it meant in Illinois? Some 640,000 people in Illinois now have insurance because of the Affordable Care Act. In a State of about 13 million people, that is a substantial number, and 400,000 of them were low-wage workers who had no benefits in their job and now qualify for Medicaid. They have health insurance.

I met one of them, Rich Romanowski. What a perfect Chicago name, right? Rich, a big barrel-chested Polish guy, is a musician. He has done part-time work all his life and he never had health insurance. Now he is in his sixties. Rich came to one of our press conferences, smacked his wallet, and said: I have a card in my wallet that says I have health insurance for the first time in my life.

He is not the only one. He is one of 400,000 in my State, which means when they get sick and go to the hospital, their bills are not passed on to the rest of us, to all the people with insurance, to those who use Medicare. They have their own insurance now, and it means they are going to be healthier.

I think of Judy. Judy works in Southern Illinois. She works in one of the motels that I stay in there, and she is a hospitality lady. When people go for breakfast, she is the one greeting us and showing us where to sit down. Judy is about 62 years old, a hard-working Southern Illinois lady and one of the sweetest people we would ever want to meet. Judy got health insurance for the first time because of the Affordable Care Act, and it is a good thing she did because she has just been diagnosed with diabetes. She needs good care because diabetes, if not treated right, can lead to serious complications: blindness, amputations. Judy has that health insurance.

Remember when the government shut down last year, Senator CRUZ of Texas came and read Dr. Seuss books to us. I came to the floor and said to him: You tell us you are shutting down

the government to protest the Affordable Care Act. Well, what do you say about Judy? Judy, who has worked in Southern Illinois all her life, has no health insurance, needs it, and is now going to get it under Medicaid. Are you going to tell me we are going to do away with this law now and take away her health insurance? What would you say to her?

Senator CRUZ said on the record on the Senate floor: Judy needs to get a better job.

I think many times folks in the Senate need to get the heck out of the Capitol, get out, meet the rest of America, and come to understand they are working hard every day, they are not getting paid a whole lot of money, and basic health insurance is beyond their reach, beyond their grasp. Well, the Affordable Care Act changed that, and we are not going back.

The House has voted over 50 times to repeal that law, and I say that as long as Barack Obama is President, that is not going to work. He is not going to let them do it. I am going to stand with him because I happen to be one of those persons who had a member of my family with a preexisting condition—the situation with my daughter.

I know the kind of discrimination that people with preexisting conditions used to face before the Affordable Care Act. We are not going back to those days. This Senator and this President for sure, we are going to fight all the way to make sure that health insurance is there for those who are struggling in their work and there for families that would otherwise not have a chance.

BANK ON STUDENTS EMERGENCY LOAN
REFINANCING ACT
STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Mr. DURBIN. I spent much of my time over the August recess visiting college campuses and talking to current students and graduates about their student debt.

I visited Northern Illinois University in De Kalb, Judson University in Elgin, and Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield, and University of Illinois at Chicago.

With an estimated 1.7 million Illinoisans holding a combined \$47 billion in student loan debt, it is no wonder that it was on the minds of nearly everyone I spoke with. On average, Illinois graduates of the Class of 2012 left with \$28,028 in debt—but individual debt is often much higher. I have had students contact me who have upwards of \$100,000 in debt and no chance to ever pay it off.

For too many young Illinoisans, and students across the country, the opportunity for a fair shot at an affordable college education has become a long shot. They do the right thing—they go to school to get ahead but end up with so much debt that it becomes impossible for them to ever pay it back let alone get ahead.

I recently met Jessica Ibares at NIU.

Jessica graduated from Northern Illinois and is now working as a financial aid counselor.

How about that? She helps others figure out how to pay for their education, but struggles paying for her own.

She holds almost \$40,000 in Federal student loan debt that she'll have to start repaying in November. Working at a public institution, she makes a modest salary and will only be able to pay about \$50 a month on her loan—which may not even cover the interest.

How will she ever start repaying the principal? Jessica will find it difficult to get out of the debt she's in—and she went to a good, public school.

DAWN THOMPSON

Imagine what students who went to predatory for-profit schools face.

I recently met Dawn Thompson in Springfield. She is a 48 year old single mother of two.

Dawn thought she was doing the right thing getting a paralegal degree from Everest College online. That is right, Everest College—one of the subsidiaries of the failed Corinthian Colleges chain.

This disgraced company was caught falsifying job placement rates and collapsed under the ensuing scrutiny. In the meantime, they left thousands of students in financial ruin with no real education to show for it, all the while making money hand over fist off of taxpayers.

Dawn could never find a job in her field with her degree from Everest. She was over \$100,000 in student loan debt, both Federal and private loans, and working a minimum wage job as a bank teller. Dawn tried to file for bankruptcy in 2013 and, you guessed it, her student loans were not dischargeable—one of the only debts that is not.

At that point, she felt like her only option was to go back to school to hopefully improve her chances of getting a good-paying job and to defer her loans. Unfortunately, she went back to Everest—she started her Master's in business administration at Everest. Regardless of what happens with Everest as they end their reign of fraud, Dawn is likely to be stuck with her \$100,000 plus student loan bill.

Perhaps the only thing more sickening than Dawn's story, is that it's not unique. While the schools I visited were different, the borrower's personal backgrounds varied, and the amount they owed unique—the refrain over and over from these Illinois students was the same: "Senator, Washington has to help us."

My guess is that my colleagues heard the same thing from some of the 40 million Americans in their States drowning in more than \$1.2 trillion in collective student loan debt.

Well, Democrats have an answer that will help many of these students—it's called the Bank on Students Emergency Loan Refinancing Act. It would help an estimated 25 million current borrowers who are struggling to repay their Federal or private student loans

refinance into lower federal interest rates—saving the average borrower \$2,000 over the life of the loan.

In Illinois, an estimated 1.1 million of the 1.7 million with student debt could lower their interest rates under our bill—nearly two-thirds of all borrowers in my home State.

Here is how it would work. Those with Federal loans could refinance into lower rates—the same rates available to students who took out loans last school year.

Those with private loans—many of which have sky-high interest rates and very few protections for borrowers—could refinance into Federal loans with lower rates and stronger consumer protections.

What's more, our bill is fully paid for.

It assesses a modest tax on millionaires to help borrowers refinance and get back on a path of financial security—this is often referred to as the Buffet Rule.

I am hopeful we will have a chance to vote again on this bill to help student borrowers.

Earlier this summer, this bill was killed by 38 Republicans who voted against even moving to debate it. These Republicans were given a choice—side with working families and students seeking the American Dream or protect millionaires from paying a single penny more in taxes; side with 25 million Americans who could be helped by the bill or 22,000 or so millionaire households who might have to pay more in taxes under the bill.

Sadly, I don't have to tell you who those 38 Republican Senators picked.

Americans across the country are talking about this issue—I have heard them. But, even so, in June, 38 Republicans said: "The Senate can't talk about it."

It doesn't seem right to me.

Thankfully, though, there were three Republicans—Senators COLLINS, CORKER, MURKOWSKI—who joined every Democrat to support moving the bill forward.

But if the 38 Republicans who voted "no" have another chance, I hope they remember the struggling students and families they talked to back home over the August recess.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

I hope they realize that if we don't give struggling borrowers another option besides default, this student debt will haunt them for the rest of their lives and will have a drag on our economy. It already is. Experts tell us it is stagnating growth in the housing market, preventing business creation, and jeopardizing future retirement security for a generation of young Americans.

CONCLUSION

I hope America's youth are paying close attention to this issue: how their Senators voted on this measure offers them the bare truth. I hope more of my Republican colleagues will join us to move forward this important piece of legislation if we get a chance to vote on it again.

But for now, it shows the stark difference between those Senators who believe hard-working students deserve a fair shot at the American Dream and those who will stand by and do nothing as America's next generation is sentenced to debt.

This afternoon my colleague Senator WARREN is coming to the floor. ELIZABETH WARREN of Massachusetts is a new Senator—and what a terrific addition to the Senate. She is the best. I have known her for years, and I encouraged her to run because I knew she would bring something special to the Senate.

She has done it. She came up with a way for college students and their families to renegotiate student loans. People can renegotiate their auto loans; they can renegotiate the mortgages on their homes. Why shouldn't students, those who have graduated, and their families who face student loan debt be able to renegotiate to a lower interest rate? That is the Warren bill.

She is right. It is a big difference. It would bring down the interest rate on undergraduate loans, I think, to 3.8 percent. I run into students who are trying to pay off loans at 9 percent. Ask anybody who owns a home the difference between a 9-percent mortgage and a 3.8-percent mortgage. They will tell you it is big. When someone makes a payment under a 3.8-percent interest rate, a lot more goes to reduce principal and you finally put that loan to rest after so many years. So Senator WARREN is going to try again. We tried it once before but couldn't get the Republican support. I think we had three—maybe three—who voted with us on the Republican side. Under Senate rules we need 60.

In my State of about 13 million, there are about 1.7 million people carrying student loan debt. They aren't all young people. They include parents who signed up for PLUS loans and even grandparents who wanted to help a grandson or a granddaughter get into college and go forward. They are carrying this debt. If ELIZABETH WARREN's bill passes to renegotiate college loans, it is going to save them—on average—\$2,000 apiece and give them a chance to reduce and retire that loan at an earlier stage.

There is an interesting phenomena going on in Chicago now. I talked to some younger friends of mine and they said: If you have an apartment for rent in Chicago, and it is a good one, get there fast and sign up quickly.

There is a land rush on to rent apartments. Why? Because younger people cannot even consider buying a condo or a little house. Why? Too much student debt. Student debt in America, cumulatively, is greater than credit card debt in America, cumulatively.

More of these students graduating with the debt, paying it off, are making life decisions because of the debt. I have run into it: They studied to be a teacher but ended up with so much debt that they couldn't even consider

it and had to take a better-paying job. We lost a good teacher because of student debt.

Students are putting off getting married, putting off going out on their own, buying a car, and, if married, starting a family. I have heard it all. That is what this student debt is all about.

When my colleagues come to the floor and say why don't we do something on a bipartisan basis, I say: This student debt isn't just a debt for Democratic students; it is a debt for all students.

So let's come together when ELIZABETH WARREN makes her unanimous consent request this afternoon and finally do something for a change, for middle income and working families who want their kids to go to school but don't want them so deep in debt that their lives are changed or ruined. That is only reasonable.

If we want to make sure that America continues to be a leader in the world, we need to graduate the very best with the education and training they need to lead our Nation. Some of them are holding back, holding back because of a fear of college debt.

One other thing I will mention, college loans are different than other loans. I studied many years ago back in law school bankruptcy law, and we learn in bankruptcy law that most of the loans you take out in life are dischargeable in bankruptcy, which means if everything fails—you lose your job, you are in a situation where there is a serious pile of medical bills and you can't get back to work—in most cases you can go to bankruptcy court and through a long process those debts will be wiped out and give you a second chance in life. It is not an easy process. It is not something people rush to, but many people have no choice.

If you did that with a college loan, it wouldn't help you a bit. College loans are not dischargeable in bankruptcy. They are with you for a lifetime. That is a sad reality. This is all the more reason to make sure those loans are affordable, all the more reason to support ELIZABETH WARREN when she talks about reducing these interest rates.

FIRST AMENDMENT

The Senator from Kentucky, Mr. McCONNELL, today talked about the vote we had on a constitutional amendment. It was an amendment which didn't get the necessary votes; it needed 67. It didn't get the necessary votes on the Senate floor.

Its sole purpose, offered by Senator UDALL from New Mexico, was to reverse the Citizens United decision. That decision by the Supreme Court basically took off the caps and limits when it came to individuals and corporations putting as much money as they wanted to into the political process. One of my colleagues, Senator KAY HAGAN of North Carolina, by her latest estimate has had more than \$20 million of negative ads run against her in her

home State—not by her opponent, not even by the North Carolina Republican Party but by these outside interests such as the Koch brothers.

The Koch brothers in the last election cycle spent over \$250 million of their own money. They are a bigger deal than most political parties now—these two brothers who are billionaires—and they are putting more money into this system. Sadly, many of the beneficiaries of the Koch brothers are walking behind them on a leash. They are being led around by them because you don't want to cross the Koch brothers.

The amendment of Senator UDALL of New Mexico would have finally given the States the authority to regulate the amount of money that could be spent on campaigns.

It comes to this: If we want mere mortals to run for public office—as opposed to multimillionaires—we have to get this playing field back under the control of the normal people. Maybe we won't have as many television ads to see—and I know how much people enjoy those—but at the end of the day we could still get our message across.

I supported and actually introduced public financing laws. I still stand by them. We would be a better country if we had public financing, took the special interests out of the campaigns, shortened the campaigns, and had actual debates. Those sorts of things would get us back to what the country is all about and maybe start to restore some confidence in Congress, in our political system, and in both political parties—and we are all pretty low at this moment.

So public financing is a right step but not likely to happen soon. Of this approach by Senator UDALL to basically reverse the Citizens United decision, the other side argues it inhibits freedom of speech. Well, there is only so much speech that individuals can claim. The Koch brothers, because of their multimillions—and there are folks on the left, incidentally, spending a lot of money too—left and right—don't deserve to pick up a microphone or have a bigger voice in our political process.

We have a lot of work to do. This week we are going to get down to business on a few things that are essential. I am sorry that yesterday the Republicans wouldn't help us when we wanted to pass pay equity and make sure that women were treated fairly in the workplace. We needed them, and they weren't there.

That is disappointing, but it is an indication of where the two parties are today on that issue. They didn't support our efforts to increase the minimum wage. I support increasing the minimum wage.

They haven't been able to help us when we come up with legislation to deal with college loans, but this afternoon they will have a second chance. I hope ELIZABETH WARREN's bill moves forward and that we end this week on a

positive note for working families and their kids who want to go to school but don't want to be burdened with the debt that is going to change their lives.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). Without objection, it is so ordered.

FACING CHALLENGES

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, as we continue with what will likely be the final legislative week before the elections, it is a good time to take a look back at the year and take stock of where we are and what Congress has accomplished.

The House of Representatives, of course, has spent the past year legislating. Members of the House have sent literally hundreds of bills over to the Senate for consideration, including 40 jobs bills, many of which passed with bipartisan support in the House of Representatives.

Even now, in the final week before recessing for election season, the House is taking up two legislative packages, one focused on creating jobs and another focused on lowering the price of gas and groceries. Unfortunately, like so many other House bills, neither of these bills is likely to go anywhere in the Democratic leader's Senate because unlike the House, the Senate has not spent the past year taking up legislation to solve the many challenges facing American families. Instead, Senate Democrats have spent the past year taking up political gimmicks and designed-to-fail messaging bills they hope will win a few votes for them in November.

Back in March—earlier this year—the New York Times reported that Democrats planned to spend the spring and summer on messaging votes “timed to coincide with campaign-style trips by President Obama.”

The Times went on to say: “Democrats concede that making new laws is not really the point. Rather, they are trying to force Republicans to vote against them.” That is from the New York Times earlier this year, which was laying out and predicting what the Democrats’ strategy was going to be for the balance of this year.

Unfortunately, Senate Democrats have followed that playbook pretty exactly. Again and again, Senate Democrats have bypassed serious legislation and chosen to bring up bills designed to win them votes with their far-left base or to smear Republicans in the November elections.

Take last week was an example. After an August recess beset by economic stagnation at home and crises

abroad, including, I might add, the murder of two American journalists at the hands of ruthless terrorist group ISIS, you might think Senate Democrats would want to spend our first week back focused on the challenges our Nation is facing.

Well, Mr. President, you would be wrong. Instead of legislation to address some of these challenges, Democrats chose to kick off this brief 2-week session with a bill to erase many of the speech protections of the First Amendment. That is right. Faced with crises abroad and a sluggish economy here at home, Democrats thought the most appropriate use of our time last week was legislation to erase parts of the First Amendment.

As with so many of the other bills they have brought up this year, Democrats knew this legislation did not have a chance of passing in the Senate. But they chose to bring it up anyway because they thought it might help get portions of their base out in November. And they swiftly followed it up with another designed-to-fail piece of legislation they hoped to use to criticize Republicans. In fact, the newspaper Roll Call reported earlier this week—this is from a story written about the Democrats’ strategy: “Republicans should prepare to be criticized regardless of how they vote” on this particular bill. The article went on to quote an email that was sent to Democratic communicators which outlined plans, and again I quote, “to slam Republicans for either blocking the bill once again or for letting us on the bill only to slow down the rest of the Senate.”

So basically the message to Democratic communicators around here on Capitol Hill was to slam Republicans no matter how they voted. If they voted to get on the bill, slam them for slowing down the Senate so we cannot do other things. If they voted against getting on the bill, obviously, attack them for blocking the bill.

So here is the strategy, at this late hour of the game when we have so many big issues and challenges facing the country: It is simply to put bills on the floor that are designed to help Democrats in the fall elections and essentially to make Republicans look bad. That is a quote. That is a direct quote from an email that was sent out to Democratic communicators: “slam Republicans” no matter how they vote. Either way, take advantage of the situation. Try and play politics with it.

There is certainly a place for campaigning. There is certainly a place for politics. But the place for campaigning is not in the halls of Congress. Our job here in Washington is to pass legislation to address the challenges facing our country. And that job does not change if one party controls the House and the other party controls the Senate. The Senate and the House still have a responsibility to work together to get serious legislation to the President, and that is certainly what the House has tried to do.

The House has sent bill after bill to the Senate, many of them, as I mentioned earlier, bipartisan bills. They got strong bipartisan votes coming out of the House of Representatives. But again and again, Senate Democrat leaders have said no—no to working together, no to bipartisan House legislation, no to developing bipartisan solutions.

Senate Republicans’ efforts have met a similar response. Again and again Republicans here in the Senate have put forward legislation to help create jobs, grow the economy, and to provide help to working families struggling with the high price of everything—from groceries to health care. Several of our bills have even received support from rank-and-file Democrats—bills such as Senator COLLINS’ Forty Hours Is Full Time Act, which would fix an ObamaCare provision that is reducing workers’ hours and wages, or Senator BLUNT’s Hire More Heroes Act, which would give employers an incentive to hire our Nation’s veterans.

But the Senate Democratic leadership has refused to consider our proposals.

Senate Republicans have even been prevented from offering amendments to bills that come before the Senate. Since July of 2013, Senate Republicans have been allowed just 14 amendment votes—less than one a month in the world’s greatest deliberative body known for unlimited debate and unlimited amendment. Less than one amendment per month, that is what Senate Republicans have been allowed in the last year. Compare that to the House of Representatives where the Democrat minority has been allowed 194 amendment votes over the same period.

When the minority party is denied a voice in the Senate, it is the American people—the people whom we represent—who are really being denied a voice.

Democrats may not control the House, but through the amendment process, they have been able to make their constituents’ voices heard. Republicans in the Senate, on the other hand, have been prevented from bringing their constituents’ voices to the legislative process.

American families are struggling. The economy continues to stagnate. Unemployment is still above 6 percent—way higher than that if you figure in the labor participation rate the number of people who have actually given up even looking for work.

Last month’s job creation was the worst this year, and opportunities for advancement in this economy are few and far between. Health care costs, which were already high when the President took office, have continued to increase. Average health care deductibles have increased 50 percent, and health care premiums have risen by an average of \$3,459 since the President took office, despite—the President’s promise that his health care law would drive down premiums by \$2,500. Gas prices have increased by